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Past month methamphetamine use increased from 9.0% to 44.0% among people who use heroin underscoring an emergent public health issue

BACKGROUND

Overdose and treatment-admission data point toward a rising prevalence of methamphetamine use among people who use heroin.

We sought to further evaluate that observation with two additional data sources: a large, crowdsourced sample of drug-using adults and a nationally representative sample of the general population.

The overall purpose was to assess the time course of any increase in co-use and to identify sociodemographic and psychological risk factors associated with methamphetamine use in people using heroin.

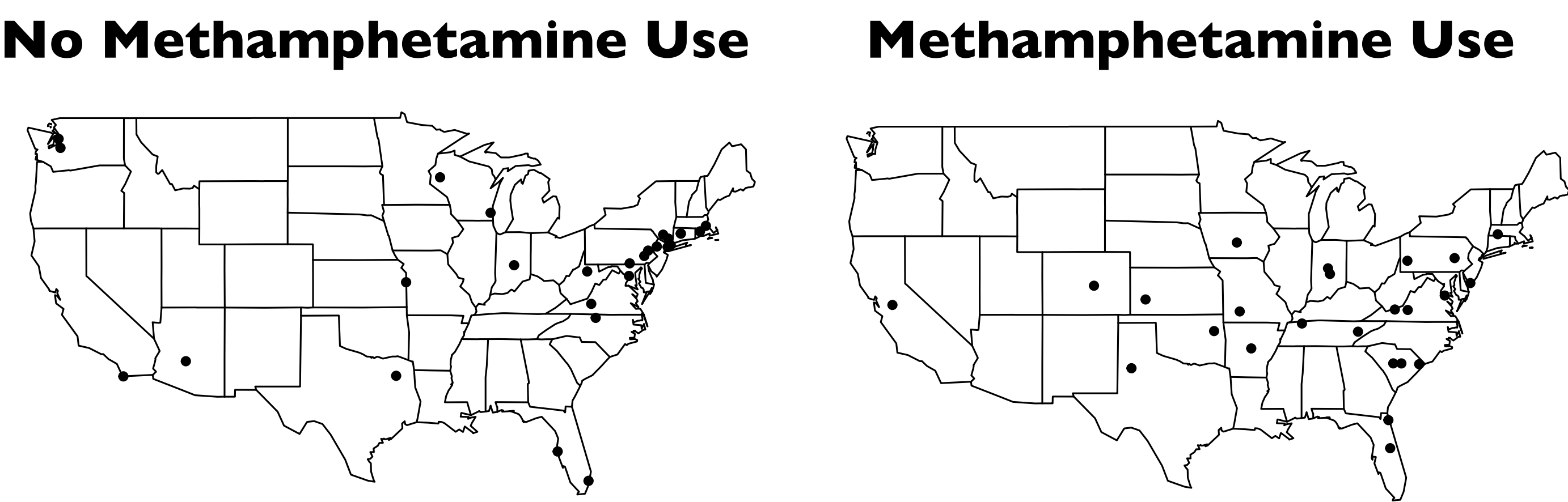
METHODS

First, we used crowdsourced data collected in 2020 from 1,510 adult Amazon Mechanical Turk participants with heterogenous drug use histories.

Second, we used general-population data from the 2015-2019 National Surveys on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).

Multivariable logistic models evaluated predictors of methamphetamine use among people using heroin.

Geographic Distribution of Methamphetamine Use by People Who Use Heroin (Crowdsourcing)



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RESULTS

Yearly Trends in Methamphetamine Use (NSDUH)

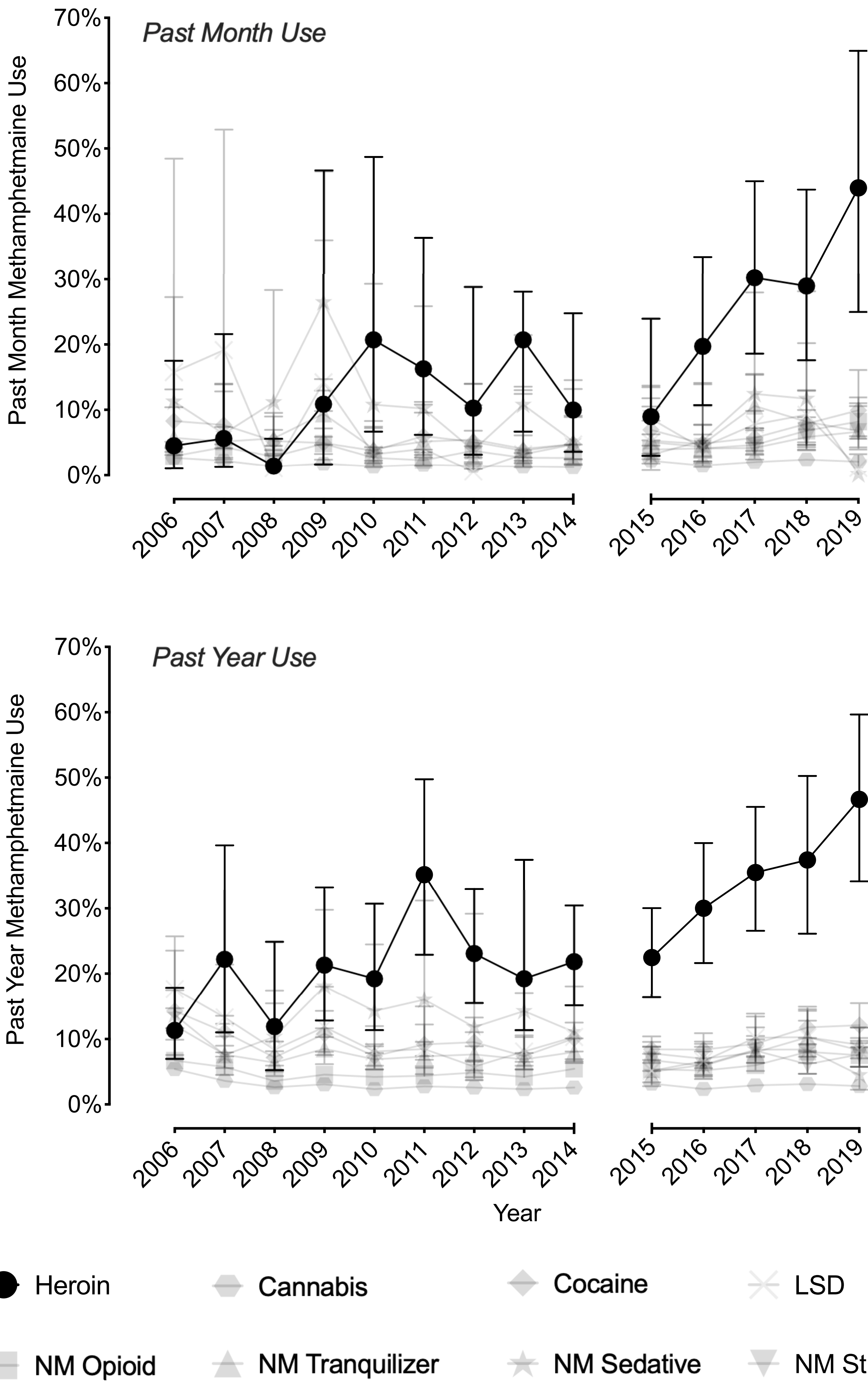
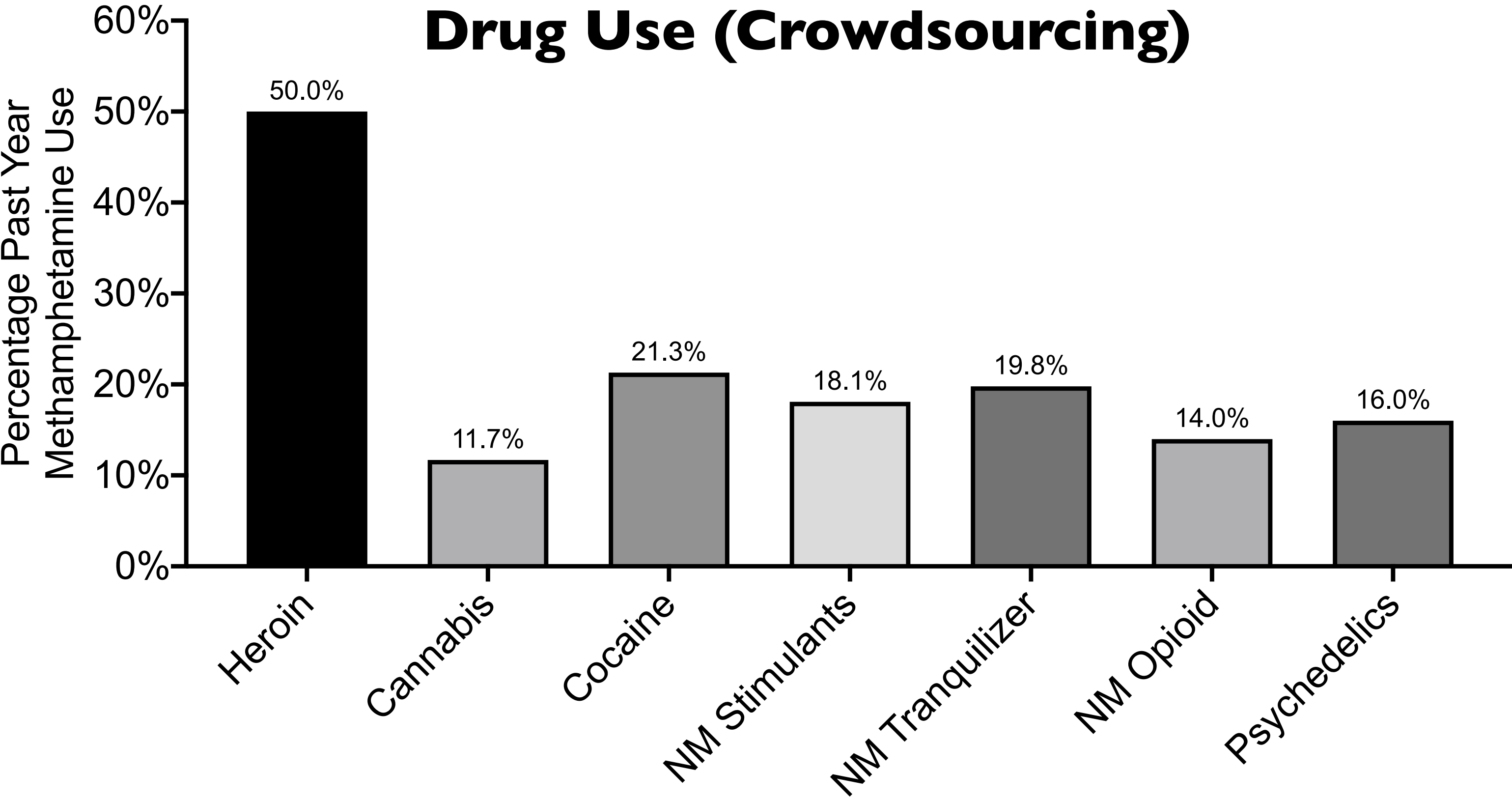


Figure. Prevalence of Methamphetamine Use within Populations Who Use Other Drugs. Plotted are prevalence estimates and 95% confidence intervals for past month (top) and past year (bottom) methamphetamine use for the population of people who used other drugs and classes in the past month (top) or past year (bottom). Estimates of methamphetamine use are plotted for the population of people reporting heroin use (black circles) as well as use of other drug types (gray symbols). NM = non-medical use.

Methamphetamine Prevalence by Other Drug Use (Crowdsourcing)



Sociodemographic Correlates of Methamphetamine Use Among People Who Use Heroin (NSDUH)

	Past Year Methamphetamine Use		
	Not in Group	In Group	AOR (95% CI)
Female	32.0%	38.1%	0.95 (0.55, 1.65)
Young (< 26 years old)	32.9%	37.9%	1.26 (0.78, 2.02)
White	23.0%	38.0%	2.15 (1.25, 3.69)**
Sexual Minority	33.2%	40.6%	1.24 (0.65, 2.35)
High School Graduate	29.8%	35.0%	1.20 (0.70, 2.05)
Employed	35.8%	32.1%	0.85 (0.55, 1.32)
Below Poverty Line	31.3%	39.3%	1.50 (0.99, 2.28)
Rural	33.1%	53.7%	2.31 (1.08, 4.95)*
Past Year Injection Drug Use	26.9%	40.3%	1.85 (1.23, 2.77)**
Serious Mental Illness	29.0%	48.7%	2.12 (1.32, 3.42)**
Past Year Drug-Specific Treatment	35.2%	30.1%	0.61 (0.39, 0.98)*

CONCLUSIONS

A rapid, selective, and sustained increase in methamphetamine use is evident among people using heroin.

These findings underscore both the urgency of this growing public health crisis and suggest commensurate urgency to address barriers to substance use disorder and psychiatric care in rural and low-income areas.

This includes improving harm reduction and prevention efforts which may be beneficial in developing comprehensive, scientifically informed intervention.